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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 KHARTOUM 000297

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DEPARTMENT FOR D, AF A/S FRAZER, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [PTER](#) [SU](#) [CD](#)
SUBJECT: S/E WILLIAMSON'S SECOND MEETING WITH NAFIE ALI
NAFIE, SENIOR NCP OFFICIALS

REF: KHARTOUM 00278

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Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

Sudanese Participants:

Nafie Ali Nafie, Assistant to the President
Mustafa Osman Ismail, Advisor to the President
Saeed Al Khatib, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies
Yehia Babiker, Member of the Joint National Transition Team
Hassan Haj Ali, NCP Advisor
Abdelbasit Sounousi, Director of the Americas Desk, Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
Mauwia Al Tom, Counselor at the Americas Desk, Ministry of
Foreign Affairs

USG Participants:

Richard Williamson, Presidential Special Envoy for Sudan
Alberto Fernandez, Charge d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy Khartoum
Cameron Hudson, NSC Director for Africa
Jana Chapman-Gates, Senior Advisor to the Special Envoy
Col. Dennis Giddens, Sudan Country Director, Office of the
Secretary of Defense
Notetaker: Payton Knopf, U.S. Embassy Khartoum

Summary

¶1. (C) President Bush has an "intense interest" in alleviating humanitarian suffering and bringing stability to Sudan, S/E Williamson told Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie and other senior Sudanese officials on February 29. He informed Nafie that the U.S. has decided to respond to President Bashir's overture to discuss an improvement in the bilateral relationship and presented a draft USG work plan of specific and verifiable actions that the U.S. expected from Sudan. He suggested that Khartoum prepare a written response within one week and that he then meet with a Sudanese team appointed by President Bashir to continue the discussion. "If three weeks from today we still don't have an agreement on a basic platform to go forward, I don't think we have much chance of making progress," predicted S/E Williamson, who also cautioned that an explosion of violence in Chad will derail the dialogue. The Special Envoy suggested that both governments work to avoid both raising expectations and "needless provocation."

¶2. (C) Summary continued: In response to a request from Ismail during his trip to Washington, S/E Williamson also

presented Nafie with a paper detailing the process for rescinding the state sponsor of terrorism designation, though cautioned that it involved both political and legal steps. S/E Williamson underscored that any dialogue be business-like and in the interests of both governments. "If I hear a litany of history, I will listen for half an hour and then describe to you the inhumanity that has occurred in Sudan," he said. Nafie pledged to take S/E Williamson's initiative seriously and accepted the timeline. He claimed that peace and stability in Chad is in the interests of Sudan. S/E Williamson is scheduled to meet President Bashir later on February 29. End summary.

U.S. Interests: Alleviating Suffering, Bringing Stability

13. (C) President Bush has an "intense interest" in improving the humanitarian situation and increasing stability in Sudan, S/E Williamson said during a two-hour meeting with Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie and senior Sudanese officials in Khartoum on February 29. In recent discussions with Foreign Minister Deng Alor and Presidential Advisor Mustafa Osman Ismail in Washington, Secretary Rice indicated that the USG is prepared to pursue President Bashir's overture to improve the bilateral relationship in an effort to achieve U.S. policy goals in Sudan, according to S/E Williamson. His current visit to Sudan is a step in this process. "My only interest is, as the President has defined it, to alleviate humanitarian suffering and to bring a more stable environment in Darfur and along the North/South border," said the Special Envoy.

Draft Work Plan

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14. (C) S/E Williamson presented Nafie with a draft USG work plan, explaining that it contained specific and verifiable actions that the U.S. expected from Sudan, including steps that will save civilian lives. He invited the Sudanese Government to respond to the draft in writing within one week listing their own expectations, and he indicated that submission of Sudan's response should be followed one week later with a meeting between S/E Williamson and senior Sudanese representatives selected by President Bashir. S/E Williamson emphasized that he sought a mechanism where, once there is an agreed work plan, both envoys report to their respective Presidents and serve as "the final check" of accountability that each government is fulfilling its commitments.

15. (C) The draft work plan is not a "take it or leave it document," said S/E Williamson, adding that while the U.S. is "adamant" about some elements, it is open to consideration of Sudan's legitimate concerns. He stipulated that a firm, unambiguous plan crystallize in the next two to three weeks. "If three weeks from today we still don't have an agreement on a basic platform to go forward, I don't think we have much chance of making progress," said S/E Williamson.

16. (C) Noting that he will not be surprised if Sudan decided it is not in its interest to continue a focused dialogue, S/E Williamson nonetheless said that he "is looking forward to an informed reply" and remained "cautiously optimistic that this provides the best opportunity between now and the next administration." "It's up to Sudan if it wants to take the first step and dance or sit back down at its seat," said the Envoy.

Warning: Chad Violence Will Derail Discussions

¶7. (C) The Special Envoy reiterated a statement he made during his earlier meeting with Nafie on February 25 that any new explosion of violence in Chad could derail U.S.-Sudan dialogue (reftel). "If we're moving to re-calibrate a complex relationship between the Government of Sudan and the United States, it cannot be divorced from Chad," argued S/E Williamson. Acknowledging that Chad's behavior would need to change as well, he said that the USG is allocating greater resources to monitor the activities of Deby's regime.

Discrete Public Posture

¶8. (C) While he will not take any actions that he is uncomfortable defending, S/E Williamson said that public scrutiny of the U.S.-Sudan dialogue at present will put both governments at the mercy of internal pressures, which will drain their energy to advance the process. Sudan and the U.S. should avoid raising expectations--such as Foreign Minister Deng Alor's February 25 statement indicating a normalization of relations in four to six months--as well as "needless provocation," he posited.

Terrorism Designation: Political and Legal Steps

¶9. (C) In response to a request from Ismail during his trip to Washington, S/E Williamson also presented Nafie with a paper detailing the process for rescinding the state sponsor of terrorism designation. He emphasized that the process involved both political and legal steps, including a 45-day Congressional notification period. S/E Williamson predicted that there would be significant public discussion in the U.S. if President Bush decided to pursue that course of action.

Nafie: U.S. Initiative in Sudan's Interests

¶10. (C) "We are going to take this initiative very seriously," said Nafie, "and it is in all of our interests." For the effort to succeed, Nafie concurred that both sides should be clear on the intricacies of any agreement. He accepted both the mechanism for a second focal point in each government and the timeline proposed by S/E Williamson--"unless both sides agreed to adjust it"--and said that Sudan would "point out what we want clarified and what

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we'll accept" in the work plan. Nafie also committed Sudan to abide by the discrete public approach suggested by S/E Williamson.

Sudan Wants Peace, Stability in Chad

¶11. (C) Nafie said that the Sudanese Government had "no special interest" in a replacement for Deby and believed that peace and stability in Chad was in Khartoum's interests. While Sudan remained ready "to deal, to talk" to the Chadian government on a bilateral basis, Nafie said that Deby should begin "to act like a head of state rather than the head of the Zaghawa."

Litany of Broken Promises

¶12. (C) After Nafie invited his colleagues to provide their own perspective, Saeed Al Khatib, the Director of the Center for Strategic Studies (a think tank affiliated with the National Congress Party (NCP)), said that if he was on the American delegation, he "would be amazed that the Sudanese

people continue to believe in dialogue." He then launched into a litany of unfulfilled U.S. commitments, including a stillborn roadmap for normalized relations negotiated with former Ambassador Timothy Carney in 1995; a promise by former A/S Walter Kansteiner and former S/CT Coffey Black to remove Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism in 2003; and the normalization of relations promised by Deputy Secretary Zoellick in 2006 in exchange for Sudan's acceptance

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of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Al Khatib similarly criticized the U.S.-Sudan counter-terrorism relationship for not leading to an improvement in bilateral ties. "We suffer from terrorism too, but we don't want to wake up in the morning and hate ourselves for collaborating when nothing comes of it," he said.

¶13. (C) "I point out these things because I want you to know how we've come to be this way," said Al Khatib, who nonetheless acknowledged that U.S.-Sudan relations had "come a long way" since 1998, when U.S. policy sought regime change in Khartoum. He said that he understood the complexity of U.S. government bureaucracy but explained that the NCP is no longer prepared to accept political sensitivities or the absence of inter-agency coordination as "a reason why agreements don't materialize." Admitting that Sudan preferred a future Republican administration over a Democratic one, Al Khatib said, "we know who sent cruise missiles into our country and who re-invigorated the peace process." Though placing the burden on the U.S. administration to shape the public debate in the U.S, Al Khatib remained open to the work plan, stating that "President Bashir has made clear to the Foreign Minister and many of us here that this is the priority for our foreign affairs, so we'll give it a go."

¶14. (C) NCP insider and university professor Hassan Haj Ali said that while there is a consensus within the Sudanese Government on the need to improve relations with the U.S., "there is no consensus on the real intentions of the U.S. administration." He said that many in the Arab world believed U.S. policy toward Sudan is aimed at unseating an Islamic government and implied that the level of mistrust required a "specific mechanism" for monitoring U.S. commitments.

¶15. (C) Yehia Babiker, a member for the Joint National Transition Team and a former negotiator for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), recalled the close coordination between Sudan and the USG during the CPA negotiations, where each government's representatives previewed ideas informally before tabling them. He said that any new dialogue should proceed in the same spirit of mutual respect. Babiker cautioned that if the U.S. administration is unable to withstand public pressure to improve relations with Sudan, "there is no point to dialogue, and your paper will disappear like all previous experiences."

Dispute on Proposal

¶16. (C) Ismail asserted that the proposal that he and Foreign

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Minister Alor presented in Washington was "either all or nothing" and angrily questioned why the elements of that paper and the outline on rescinding the state sponsor of terrorism designation were not included in the U.S. work plan. Interrupting Ismail, Nafie clarified that "this is their paper, and now they want ours." Ismail replied that S/E Williamson should expect the points from his and Alor's paper to be included in Sudan's response. He urged S/E Williamson to secure access for the Sudanese Ambassador in Washington to meet with U.S. officials so that he could pass messages and criticized the operational impediments

afflicting the Sudanese Embassy. He warned that Sudan could not accept S/E Williamson's proposal if the U.S. pursued new sanctions. "We're not saying we should start a normalization," said Ismail, "but at least let's freeze an escalation." (Comment: Ismail's angry and defensive questioning was likely an attempt to show Nafie, a rival within the NCP, that he did not return from Washington empty-handed and to maintain credibility vis-a-vis his more hard-line rival. End comment.)

¶17. (C) CDA Fernandez explained that while Sudanese obstruction of U.S. Embassy construction put U.S. diplomats "at risk of being killed," the difficulties experienced by Sudanese diplomats in the U.S. were not as grave. "Our people are at risk here," he said. "You are not at risk there." Nafie then intervened to shift the discussion.

Moving Past History

¶18. (C) S/E Williamson characterized the bilateral relationship as a "complicated history of disappointments on both sides" but said that recitation of the past is a waste of time. "If I hear again a litany of history, I will listen for half an hour and then describe to you the inhumanity that has occurred in Sudan," he said. S/E Williamson demanded that any dialogue be business-like, in the interests of both government, and "not as a favor." "I don't want you to think you owe me, and I don't want you to think I owe you," he asserted. "I don't want you to worry about my internal problems, and I am not going to worry about your internal problems."

¶19. (C) Underscoring the paucity of time that remained to change the trajectory of the relationship, S/E Williamson said he was "shocked and very disappointed" by Ismail's criticism. The paper on the state sponsor of terrorism designation was prepared at Ismail's request, and the work plan is the first stage in starting a dialogue about each country's interests. Regarding the dispute over the embassies, S/E Williamson recalled that Secretary Rice said during her meetings with Alor and Ismail that the U.S. is willing to address the issues but not link them to overall discussion on the bilateral relationship, a proposal that Sudan had rejected. "If you want to work on the two embassies, it can be done within a week," said Williamson. "If that's not happening, it's your decision."

Agreement on Practical, Pragmatic Approach

¶20. (C) If the U.S.-Sudan dialogue is to progress, both sides will need to minimize their rhetoric in favor of focused, substantive discussions, said S/E Williamson. "I won't lecture you--even if I feel there are reasons for it--and you won't lecture me--even if you feel there are reasons for it," he said. "We can begin to lay the foundation for a long-term, practical, mature relationship between governments, but I'm not asking you to take anything on faith. I'm not asking you to believe we can take care of the terrorism designation with a waive of the hand." Nafie responded that "a practical, pragmatic approach is very good with us, and we must put the past behind us. I hope we score a success."

Comment

¶21. (C) Regime hard-liner Nafie Ali Nafie seemed to have a firm grasp of both the stakes and the outline of a way forward while his more "moderate" colleagues wanted to discuss alleged past grievances. Known as a blunt, efficient

negotiator, he will almost certainly play a key role in advancing or burying this initiative. End comment.

¶22. (U) S/E Williamson cleared this message.

¶23. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
FERNANDEZ